DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 428 925 RC 021 958

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TITLE	Sm'algyax Language Renewal: Prospects and Options.
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	17p.; Chapter 3 in: "Revitalizing Indigenous Languages. Papers presented at the Annual Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposium (5th, Louisville, KY, May 15-16, 1998)"; see RC 021 955.
AVAILABLE FROM	Web site: http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/RIL_Contents.html
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*American Indian Education; American Indian Languages; Canada Natives; Educational Needs; Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Language Maintenance; *Native Language Instruction; *Second Language Instruction; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS	British Columbia; *Tsimshian

ABSTRACT

School District 52 (Prince Rupert, British Columbia) is committed to providing support for the renewal of Sm'algyax, the language of the Tsimshian Nation. However, the Tsimshian Nation must provide guidance and establish a positive direction for Sm'algyax language programs. This paper examines language renewal issues and options as a basis for decision making by the Tsimshian Nation about language teaching and usage. Sections of background information cover: (1) the current state of Sm'algyax (precarious, with mostly elderly speakers); (2) differentiation between processes of language learning and language acquisition; (3) five possible levels of language fluency; (4) the need for a family and community component of language learning; (5) the need to incorporate traditional oral literature that embodies the Tsimshian world view into language programs; and (6) the need to create a Sm'algyax Language Authority to make language policy and provide ongoing support for language renewal. An Internet search and communication with other educators yielded examples of effective language learning programs in indigenous communities in North America, Australia, and Pacific Islands. Practices in these programs included use of print-based materials, teacher-centered instruction, media-based instruction, computer-assisted instruction, Internet resources and hypertext, learner-controlled instruction, experiential approaches, cultural immersion, linguistic immersion, and mentorship or master-apprentice models. Recommendations and recent Tsimshian program developments are discussed. (SV)

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Sm'algyax Language Renewal: Prospects and Options

Daniel S. Rubin

This paper describes the Sm'algyax language program being implemented in School District 52 in Prince Rupert, British Columbia. It examines ways to support language renewal ranging from traditional forms of instruction and print-based materials to computer interaction and internet resources.

School District 52, located in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Canada, has made a major commitment to First Nations[1] language and culture programs. To follow through on the commitment to provide support for the renewal of Sm'algyax, the language of the Tsimshian Nation, followed by the Nisga'a and Haida languages, a well-informed and strongly supported approach to language programs is needed. The development of programs in the three traditional First Nations languages in District 52 is not a simple matter. Finding and training instructors, defining the approaches to be taken, and developing appropriate materials requires new partnerships and new ways of looking at language learning. Nor does the responsibility for language renewal rest entirely with the schools. It is widely recognized and affirmed, by local and non-local, native and nonnative individuals, that responsibility for the renewal and spread of traditional languages and cultural practices rests inherently with First Nations communities.

Over the past decade, support for First Nations language learning within British Columbia schools has created a range of language programs, but these programs have not produced a significant resurgence in fluency. It may be that no school-based program alone can have this effect (Cantoni, 1997; Fishman, 1996). However, with the foundational work that has now been completed and support from new communications technologies, unprecedented possibilities are emerging, just as the hope for language continuity fades with the aging of those who still speak traditional languages.

There was an immediate need for the Tsimshian Nation to provide guidance and to establish a positive direction for Sm'algyax language programs. At annual meetings in 1994 and 1995 the Tsimshian Tribal Council affirmed the importance of cultural and language continuity in its resolutions and supported the establishment of a Sm'algyax Language Authority.

The urgency of the situation calls for teamwork and a commitment between the Tsimshian Nation and District 52 to find new contexts in which the language will be used on a daily and/or occasional basis. To be effective and legitimate, key decisions regarding the preservation and teaching of Sm'algyax must be made by the Tsimshian community. These decisions are needed quickly and

[1]"First Nations" is a term currently used to describe indigenous (American Indian) groups in Canada.

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should be informed by the best information available regarding the state of the language, language program options, and the urgency of the situation.

State of the language

The current state of Sm'algya̲x, like other First Nations languages in British Columbia and across North America, is precarious after 100 years of interactions that have systematically undermined and discouraged language use and cultural continuity. At this time however, a resurgence of cultural pride and autonomy is taking place. Since Sm'algya̲x and Tsimshian cultural traditions have persisted in spite of the forces of assimilation, there is cause for optimism. With the active support of schools and other institutions, programs to support language renewal have been established. Yet, even with this support, the continuity of Sm'algya̲x is in jeopardy. District 52, like others in British Columbia, has had language programs in place for two decades, and some evidence should exist of a basic increase in language use and fluency among the young if these programs have been effective. In fact, there is little evidence that a transfer of linguistic skills or usage to the younger generation has taken place.

While it is inspiring and reassuring to see the public use of Sm'algya̲x within the formal affairs of the Tsimshian Nation, and while many individuals have called for improved instruction in the language, there are few existing settings in which the use of Sm'algya̲x is required. According to one knowledgeable local educator who has worked with the language over the past two decades, only a few hundred fluent speakers remain, and almost all of these are over 50 years old. The lack of young people speaking Sm'algya̲x threatens the survival of Tsimshian culture. According to Nisga'a linguists and educators Alvin and Bert McKay, "A people's own language is a symbol of their ethnic identity, as well as a repository of much of their cultural heritage; its loss threatens the life and vitality of the culture" (1987, p. 66). This is especially true because the language is more than a symbol. It embodies a way of seeing, which is expressed in its syntax and structure even more than in the particular words that make it up.

It is understandable, with the complex issues facing First Nations communities—land claims, health issues, educational funding and academic parity, fisheries, forestry, and devolution toward self-government—that language renewal has not received more attention until now. However, language renewal may be one key to cultural integrity and effectiveness. For First Nations individuals who are becoming well established economically and socially within the larger society, maintaining a connection with the worldview and traditions of their people has become very important. For many First Nations students, their deeply felt interest in learning about and maintaining their cultural connections may be a source of motivation for language learning. But how can this motivation best be supported and extended?

Learning vs. acquiring a language

Language learning is a complex process, even though we recognize that young children accomplish it readily. Infants have the ability to make the full

range of sounds found in all the languages of the world, but this ability lessens as we grow older. Acquisition of a second language is more problematic for older people, and language learning in adult education is fundamentally different from language learning for children.

Traditional instructional approaches based on rote instruction and repetitive practice have been used in District 52, as in other districts, but they have not been particularly successful in developing fluency. There is a crucial difference between accumulating words and phrases and knowing how to use them in a real life situation. As some educators and linguists have pointed out, this is the difference between "learning" a language and truly "acquiring" that language for daily use.

T.L. McCarty (1988) notes that, "The distinction between acquiring and learning a language is...essentially a distinction between *meaning* and *surface form*." (p. 74). Teacher-centered instruction has not helped learners acquire a deeper understanding of meaning, because (a) the approach to learning has been passive rather than communicative, (b) support for language use outside the school has been largely missing, and (c) students have limited opportunities to use the language communicatively in school. Again, McCarty writes,

> Classroom-based language development activities...frequently ignore what is known about the structure and acquisition of language, separating out discrete linguistic tasks to be 'taught' as isolated tasks. Such approaches disembody language, depriving Indian children of the opportunity to use their language...in real communication. (p. 81)

As Steve Greymorning (1997 & this volume) attests from his experience with the teaching of Arapaho, the focus on learning vocabulary and a lack of opportunity for the daily practice of speaking that is found in much classroom language instruction limits children's natural abilities to learn and use language. McCarty (1988) maintains that, "Language acquisition... is a much more complex and subconscious process than repeating, imitating, and practicing" (p. 71). There is a need to recognize the elusive, subtle, emotional, and personal aspects of language use. McCarty concludes that "the subconscious processes of making sense of language input, in purposeful communication, most influence oral language development in both first and second language situations. Conscious learning, on the other hand, has a more limited role" (pp. 74-75). On the structural level, language is made up of units called *phonemes* (sound units), *morphemes* (units of meaning), *syntax* (word order), *usage rules* (how words are to be used), and *interpretive rules* (how to tell what words mean). However, in terms of actual language use, language is the vehicle for feeling, imagery, poetry, story, and metaphor. To understand the essence, the life within the language, is the point of language learning.

The most effective situations for language learning are communicative, natural, interactive, creative, subtle, powerful, and metaphoric. Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963) built on this understanding of language in the programs she developed

while working with Maori students in New Zealand. She used a questioning technique she called "Key Vocabulary" to draw out words of great personal significance from students, then built her language program around using these personally potent words in sentences and stories. When I worked with Sylvia in the mid-1970s I saw that it was difficult for her to pass on her understanding to teachers. The traditions of the education system, based on rational deductive thinking and rote learning, break everything up into little bits, so we easily miss the point: what does this mean to the child? Without a personally meaningful reason for children to learn and use their language, why would we expect them to learn it? Thus, an effective language program design depends on defining meaningful outcomes for the program.

Five levels of fluency

Five possible levels of fluency can be identified as possible outcomes for language instruction. The same level may not be appropriate as a goal for all learners.

- **passive**: able to understand common words or phrases, with or without deeper comprehension of their meaning
- **symbolic**: able to use common phrases and sentences in formal settings, as symbols of language participation and cultural ownership
- **functional**: able to speak the language, with basic understanding of its syntax, grammar, and rules of usage and a minimal vocabulary
- **fluent**: able to understand and speak the language with confidence and skill, with understanding of normal syntax, grammar and rules of form, and an extensive and growing vocabulary
- **creative**: able to understand and speak the language fluently in ways that create new word usage and structures, showing a deeper understanding of the language and its potential new uses

People who speak a language obviously operate at different levels at different times. But it should be possible to define general or minimum goals for school programs in Sm'algyax at different grade levels. Until we define the goals of the program, it will be extremely difficult to develop curricular scope and sequence or implement effective language programs.

Need for a community dimension

It is widely recognized that the main responsibility for traditional language learning must centre in the home. It is not appropriate for the school to take this responsibility away from families and communities who ultimately own the language. Schools can play a role by organizing and presenting opportunities for children to learn and use Sm'algyax, but any attempt to teach the language solely within the school will fail (Cantoni, 1997). This caveat has serious and immediate implications for language programs in this district.

How will the community component be organized? Who will organize and present it? How will the language find its way into the homes of parents who do not presently speak Sm'algyax? How will embarrassment and the initial difficulty of learning the sounds and syntax of Sm'algyax be overcome? First Nations educators are aware that dialect differences and other issues can fragment the community, making the process of language renewal very difficult. Across three generations there can be elders with a traditional orientation, parents looking both forward and back, and youth caught up in MTV and being kids. All three generations must get together if First Nations cultures are to be saved.

The community dimension of language programs has yet to be defined for the Tsimshian Nation. Until the village communities and urban groups, with the active and visible support of the Tsimshian Tribal Council, stand together to support language renewal, it is unlikely that any program School District 52 implements will have a significant impact.

Oral literature as curriculum

Another reason it is difficult to teach the language in the schools is that Sm'algyax belongs to a real world setting that is natural, traditional, and imbued with its own set of meanings and ways of seeing. It embodies a different worldview from the Western scientific one around which schools are organized. Some attempts to record, document, and transmit the Tsimshian worldview have been made. These have ranged from anthropological and linguistic studies to illustrated books for children. Throughout British Columbia, First Nations groups have been authoring their own locally appropriate expressions of culture and traditions.

District 52's major project, undertaken in collaboration with Tsimshian communities, resulted in the completion of the Tsimshian Series, seven books based on traditional *adawx* (historical narratives) that help define the Tsimshian Nation. Although the stories presented within the Series were taken from oral literature, they are certainly as valid a basis for curriculum as the teachings of math, biology, or eurocentric geography. As First Nations educators and leaders are increasingly pointing out, traditional ways of knowing do not necessarily have to be referenced to the European traditions to be valid. It will be important to actively support and validate the use of oral literature in the schools.

There is also a deeper way of seeing the role and importance of these stories, beyond their use in curriculum. The traditions of the Tsimshian, as expressed in adawx, in stories recorded by William Beynon, Franz Boas, and others who have studied these traditional tellings, present a creative theme of rebirth and regeneration.

We can look at the present desire to reaffirm and renew culture and language as an opportunity for creating new cultural forms. Within the feasting tradition that is so important to the Tsimshian people are models of how culture and language are to be passed on. The Tsimshian community can certainly draw on its own traditions to ensure its continuity, define who will pass on the lan-

guage, and determine how this will be accomplished. To defer this responsibility to the education system will likely lead to language loss.

The development of well-organized, highly visible initiatives that capture the imagination and support of the community will be very important. This process may become easier once a Sm'algyax Language Authority is established.

Establishing a Sm'algyax Language Authority

The creation of a Sm'algyax Language Authority is an essential step toward language renewal. With a language authority in place, decisions regarding training and certification of language teachers, maintenance of traditional patterns of grammar and syntax, and a screening process for new words and word forms can be made with input from representatives of the principal groups within the Tsimshian Nation. More fundamentally, this body can serve to unify and focus the cultural aspirations of the Tsimshian people at a time when unity and commitment are needed to keep the language from disappearing. As a body with the authority to review and develop language policy, the Sm'algyax Language Authority can move in a positive direction to elicit enthusiasm and support from village Band Councils and other Tsimshian community groups. It can also provide guidance for the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of new programs.

Options for Language Learning

I have found the Internet to be an invaluable tool for researching examples of effective language learning in indigenous communities in North America and elsewhere, and communication with educators in Australia, Vanuatu, Hawai'i, California, South Dakota, Ontario, and throughout British Columbia revealed a range of programs and approaches from which to choose. Depending on the goals established for a language program, using one or more of the ways of supporting learning discussed below may be appropriate.

Print-based materials

Over the past decade, the major focus in District 52 and throughout First Nations education has been on developing print-based materials: books, worksheets, pamphlets, posters, and games. The quality of these materials has improved over the years, from hastily assembled scrapbook-like collections of stories, visual images, and word lists to published narratives and texts written in the traditional language, with or without English translations.

Some print materials have been developed to a level that is high quality and effective. In a few instances, actual textbooks for traditional languages have been compiled. Daisy Sewid-Smith developed a Liq'wala/Kwak'wala instructional grammar, which is being used in a secondary program in the Campbell River School District. When I visited the Campbell River program, I was impressed by its effectiveness. Its strength was its organization around the func-

tional structure of the language, which helps new speakers respect and use the language in its traditional form, rather than modifying it into pseudo-English forms.

Our own Tsimshian Series is the local result of an ambitious publishing venture. The Series is richly illustrated and presents a range of traditional adawx that embody and pass on the traditions and pride of the Tsimshian people. While the general reaction to the Series, both within and outside the district, has been quite positive, there have also been some issues raised, including concerns about the small sans-serif type, difficulty for non-speakers in pronouncing the Sm'algyax text, and the fact that the text, although written at a lower intermediate level in terms of word length, is actually more appropriate for use at the lower secondary level because of the complexity of the concepts that are presented.

Current projects of First Nations Education Services Department of School District 52 include development of a new series of illustrated books that include an intermediate level seaweed book and a carefully selected collection of primary level Txamsm stories. Work is underway to develop a series of phrase books for basic conversation, as well as a "Seasonal Rounds" poster series that will bring 400 Sm'algyax words into classrooms and homes.

Print materials are essential to develop literacy (reading and writing) in Sm'algyax. But even the best texts and storybooks do not ensure language continuity. Future development of print materials should be guided by the goals of the entire program. The dictionary and grammar developed by linguist Dr. John Dunn represent first steps toward a comprehensive reference work on the Sm'algyax language that is urgently needed as the main reference for language learning. Consideration should be given to expanding these references and transferring them to a computer data file, so they can be continuously expanded and improved. This work must be done while it is still possible to find living fluent speakers of Sm'algyax, individuals who are now of advancing age.

Dr. Dunn has made available course materials from his UNBC course based on the adawx "Adaoga gan Sit'aataksa wil Baasaxga Gyemk." This material has been reproduced and spiral bound and is now being used in the village schools.

Teacher-centered instruction

Based on visits to village schools, meetings, and discussions with the language teachers, it is clear that teacher-centered instruction is having limited effectiveness in developing fluency in Sm'algyax. The teachers have pointed out the following issues and problems:

- it is difficult to teach Sm'algyax effectively in short, intermittent half-hour sessions
- issues of respect and focus arise while working with students
- students are having difficulty retaining basic vocabulary
- students do not use their language after they leave the classroom
- there is little support from the home for language learning

- there is a need for more effective and vivid learning materials
- the traditional cultural context for learning the language is missing from schools

None of these issues is the result of lack of training or commitment on the part of the language teachers. The teachers have been the backbone of this program for years and are doing a good job with their students. These frustrations are inherent to the general situation of language loss, and the difficulties are characteristic of all second language programs.

The key reasons for limited success have been: (1) language and culture are not at the center of the curriculum, (2) instruction is repetitive and does not require students to actively develop and use their language, (3) approaches based on passive learning generate lower levels of commitment and interest than active student-centered learning, and (4) the quality of locally developed materials for language learning in Sm'algyax has been limited by the time and resources available in the past.

The tendency to develop programs in which the teacher is the main or only source of the language should be seriously examined. This approach restricts the ways students learn the language and tends to limit interactions to passive listening, repetition, and imitation. This teacher-centered instructional approach may develop the lower levels of language use (passive and symbolic) but will certainly not encourage higher levels (functional, fluent, and creative).

Additional inservice sessions for language teachers and training of new language teachers could address some of these issues and encourage the use of more learner-centered approaches, including games, interactive strategies, cultural immersion activities, new materials for use in the home, and the development of community-based programs to supplement and support school programs. New policies regarding the place of traditional culture and the Sm'algyax language in schools may be needed if traditional learning is to occupy a place of greater prominence within the school.

While comfortable and familiar, the teacher-centered approach (especially with the present intermittent scheduling of language instruction) offers little hope of developing any higher level of fluency.

Media-based instruction

Other school districts and sites in other jurisdictions have begun to use electronic media as a focus for language learning. Computer-interactive and computer-aided instruction are considered separately below, with the focus here being audiotapes, videotapes, slide programs, and interactive language machines, such as those that play flashcards with audiotape affixed.

These materials have been used mainly to supplement and support teacher-focused instruction. Media-based materials allow students to learn more independently, but scheduling constraints still impose severe limits on students' ability to spend time with the materials, unless they are available for them to take home.

Taking these materials home can make them expensive, since a certain amount of loss or damage is inevitable.

Videotapes, because of the protective design of the case and the familiarity of video, could readily bring language experiences into the home for both the students and parents. Videos in the home would also expose preschool children to spoken and written Sm'algyax. However, development of high quality video programming can be time-consuming and expensive. Through partnerships with other districts and tribes or with independent filmmakers, inexpensive, effective programming could be created. One possible format for such materials would be a children's show, hosted by an elder, with segments to include a traditional story, some focus on basic vocabulary used in conversation, a segment highlighting contemporary life in the villages (fishing, seaweed gathering, feasting, band council operations), and so forth. District 52 already has on hand two examples of stories told in English by Ernie Hill, taped in Hartley Bay, that provide simple but effective examples of videos for use in presenting traditional content through storytelling. A video series is one option to be further explored.

Computer-interactive and computer-assisted instruction

Computer learning programs are becoming common. They are being used at home, in schools, and in the workplace. The positive qualities of such programs are that they are inexpensive, can be reproduced in large numbers, are predictable, often have self-evaluation built in, are (in a limited sense) interactive, and most schools have access to some computer hardware. However, few schools have enough computers at this time to give every student access to one on a daily basis.

Computer-assisted instruction (sometimes the term is used to mean any interactive learning program on a computer) is probably more effective if the computer is used as a reference or supplementary source of linguistic information. For example, an interactive dictionary can help students look up word meanings, practice pronunciation, or check spelling. A computer-based language program can be used by a small group of students working as a team to solve a puzzle or play a game.

First Nations Education Services has begun assembling the hardware and software required for CD-ROM production. Thus School District 52 will soon be able to develop and manufacture their own interactive CDs that play on a computer. This format offers several interesting possibilities: 1) Stories can be linked with a dictionary in the computer's memory that would pronounce the story in Sm'algyax, translate words, phrases or the whole story into English, and provide visual images to accompany the story. 2) Games and puzzles can be developed that require language skills for their use or solution. This would provide an added incentive for language learning by students. 3) Reference materials can be developed, such as a list of all recorded Sm'algyax texts, giving older students opportunities to become researchers, studying and developing new uses for Tsimshian narratives.

Contact with other sites (such as the Carrier-Sekani and the Yinka Dene Institute) indicates that while they have been making use of this format, it was expensive to produce and is only one tool for language learning. Based on evaluation of a CD-ROM program for English language learning that I helped carry out for the Saanich School District, I would offer the same conclusion: a CD-ROM disk is a tool, not a complete program. As such, it may be worthwhile to develop the capacity for CD-ROM production, but the chief limitation is that once transferred to disk, materials are static and unchanging, at least until you revise and issue new versions.

The Hawaiian language program, supporting immersion schools based on the Maori language nest model, has now moved into production of computer programs. The staff of the Hawaiian Language Center, based at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, have produced a number of interactive programs written entirely in Hawaiian (no English ever appears onscreen). They are currently translating the Macintosh operating system into Hawaiian. This ambitious program can be accessed via the Internet as well (see hypertext section, below).

A number of other computer programs for language learning and linguistic research have been developed, including a directory of aboriginal languages in Australia stored on a computer and accessible worldwide via the Internet. The resources at the Australian languages site include a manual for language workers, laying out a step-by-step procedure for recording and accessing linguistic information on computer. These resources suggest new computer-based possibilities that are made even more interesting with the introduction of the World Wide Web and html as a text format.

Internet resources and hypertext

Research has increasingly made use of the Internet, and specifically that aspect of the Net referred to as the World Wide Web. On the Web, text is written in hypertext markup language (html, for short). HTML allows the reader to jump from a word or phrase to another point on the Web automatically, just by clicking on the highlighted text. So text written in html generates a nonlinear web of information. As First Nations education sites have begun to appear on the Web, they are being linked together into a constantly changing network of new possibilities that educators can access.

Text written in html also has some special applications for language learning. The wide range of possibilities includes a new type of dictionary, with words linked in a variety of ways (see e. g., Miyashita & Moll, this volume), including some that are more natural than alphabetic and are actively linked to texts such as stories. For language learners and researchers, the resulting hypertext document can begin to reflect the realities of the original culture, rather than a European interpretation. One example of this is a program called "The Red Road," which appears on the Web as a series of webpages complete with vivid First Nations imagery and links to a large amount of cultural information.

We do need to find ways to embody the worldview and structure of the language visually. This is also important because Sm'algyax, like some other

First Nations languages, emphasizes relationship and action, rather than focusing on nouns as label words. A standard dictionary should still be developed, but the hypertext version could be much more flexible and responsive to the needs and interests of learners.

Various types of sites exist on the Internet, including mail servers that deliver personal e-mail, web homepages that represent companies, government offices, and educational sites, and listservers that "publish" discussions by sending comments out to a mailing list of subscribers and chatlines that provide for real-time discussion among several persons at once. A new and innovative type of site is called "Pow-Wow." Pow-Wow allows up to seven people at once to link together and talk to each other, while moving through the Net as a group. This offers some exciting new possibilities for linking learners from different sites (say, two village schools and two schools in town) and allow them to use the Internet as a learning tool while sharing what they learn.

A school district or even First Nations Education Services could establish its own homepage on the Web, allowing students, speakers, teachers, and linguists to continuously access and add information to it. In this way, the Internet would offer twenty-first century technology to the revival of an ancient language while helping learners acquire valuable contemporary job skills.

The Silent Way: Letting learners learn

Jim Green, a linguist and teacher who works with the Lakota language in South Dakota, has developed a method of language learning called the Silent Way after the work of Caleb Gattegno (1972). It is called this because the teacher does a minimum of talking, always speaks in the native language, and encourages learners to do the talking and the learning. Green describes this approach as "subordinating teaching to learning" and explains that this strategy is based on a deep respect for learners, a respect not always found in education.

The Silent Way has been widely used in math teaching, where manipulable materials like attribute blocks and Cuisenaire rods allow learners to learn directly. The approach is based on the ideas of Gattegno, a professor of mathematics. Jim Green, who worked with Gattegno, uses these same colored wooden blocks to teach concepts like number, color, and simple language forms in Lakota. His internet site (http://www.geocities.com/Paris/9463/method.html) explains this method. The site includes color-coded phonics charts that help students learn the sounds of Lakota without a teacher having to model them.

Although this approach sounds exotic, it is fairly simple and suggests that there are ways to create and use materials that encourage students to move at their own pace, building language skills in a nonthreatening environment. However, ultimately they will need to begin using language interactively, so any approach based on materials, whether print, media-based, or computer-based, will benefit from an active, experiential component.

Experiential approaches to language learning

During November and December of 1995 a plan was completed for an integrated language and culture curriculum for Grades 8 and 9 in Lax Kw'alaams. Inspired by the idea that language and culture need each other to be meaningful, the program is an integrated Sm'algyax Language/Tsimshian Culture course with units focused on traditional seasonal activities. Copies of the outline of this course are available from First Nations Education Services (825 Conrad Street, Prince Rupert, BC VAJ 3B8 Canada).

Experiential learning focuses on doing, rather than on passive listening and reading. There are many examples of successful experiential education in physical education, outdoor education, cultural exchange, and apprenticeship programs. For Sm'algyax to have meaning and relevance to learners, it may help to combine its use with traditional hands-on activities, such as berry picking, fishing, food preparation, smoking fish, hunting, drum making, dancing, carving, weaving, and feasting. These experiences provide opportunities for language use and place demands on students that are holistic and natural: to have respect for those with traditional knowledge and skills, to pay attention, to practice manual skills, and to remember important details.

Experiential approaches, according to input from the members of the Sm'algyax Committee, the First Nations Role Models and the students themselves, would be a preferred way to learn the traditions of the Tsimshian people and to begin to speak Sm'algyax. An initial, informal survey indicated Grade 8 students in Lax Kw'alaams also support this option.

Experiential programs generally take a good deal of preparation, resources, and scheduling to be successful. If strongly supported by the community and the school, they can provide memorable experiences for children, experiences they will carry with them for many years. The use of writing, reading, and speaking in the Sm'algyax language can be woven through such programs. Experiential programs may involve field trips, hands-on activities, and require a more flexible attitude toward scheduling on the part of school staff.

Cultural immersion

Cultural immersion carries the experiential approach to its logical conclusion: living and working in a traditional setting for a period of time. This approach has been the basis for Rediscovery Programs, Culture Camps, and other immersion programs. By combining language and culture in an outdoor setting, students are given a chance to absorb and learn from their elders in natural surroundings. This is a powerful option, but one that will require an even stronger commitment from the local community and careful preparation to ensure the safety of participants, the availability of necessary resources, and positive experiences for participants.

A great deal of expertise now exists regionally and locally, so there is no need to "reinvent the wheel" when it comes to organizing and setting up such a program. It would be up to each local community to provide space and resources

for such a program, which probably would operate best during the summer months.

Another variation on cultural immersion is a setting such as a fishing camp, traditional smokehouse, or carving shed in which language use and cultural learning become natural parts of participation in a traditional activity. This type of approach should be encouraged because it is so motivating for learners and provides a natural, rather than an artificial, academic setting to support learning about the traditions of the Tsimshian people.

Linguistic immersion

The best known, and probably most successful, immersion program for language learning among First Nations would probably be the Maori language nests, originally established over 20 years ago in New Zealand. Now extending into the university level, these immersion schools offer instruction in Maori in all subjects. Canada's French immersion schools are based on the same premise: that to learn a language one must live and work in it on a full-time basis.

Not everyone thrives in such a setting, but for some learners, with the enthusiastic support of their parents, the language immersion setting has been very effective. However, any approach to schooling that separates and isolates a group of students will have some disadvantages as well as advantages.

A complete immersion environment requires that teachers be fully fluent and supplied with materials that allow them to work in the language of choice. This is quite a challenge when the language is not a modern one in use within a large population. A careful look at the availability and cost of creating new materials would be advisable before any commitment to an indigenous language immersion school is made.

English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, who deal with mixed groups of immigrant children in Canada and the United States, have become frustrated with standard learning materials and have led the way in creating some of the most exciting and effective materials for language learning. They focus on interactional strategies and games that allow learners to become more independent and to play while learning. This approach can be highly effective if students are encouraged to accept independence and responsibility. Many examples, models, and strategies could be borrowed from the ESL field to create new materials for indigenous language learning.

Mentorship and language continuity

Presently, there is an immediate need for younger fluent speakers of Sm'algyax to act as linguists and teachers. Training these individuals through intensive mentorship may be one of the best investments that can be made at this time. The master-apprentice model developed in California is an excellent way to provide this training (Hinton, 1994). It has been suggested by Margaret Anderson, a scholar who works with Tsimshian languages, that if the thousands of dollars previously spent on researching and writing dictionaries and grammars were allocated to such mentorships (through honoraria for mentors and students)

the language would already have been passed on to a core group of younger new speakers. The work of language teachers and teachers who have included traditional cultural elements in our schools has been invaluable. However, while honoring the work that has been done, it is now urgent that new approaches be considered. The development of mentorship programs to help create a core group of younger speakers should be seriously considered as an option for language renewal.

Recommendations

It is recommended that a high priority be placed on developing policy to support new approaches to language learning for Sm'algyax in School District 52. A combination of approaches may provide the best solution and offer the best opportunity to develop and field-test new materials and instructional strategies. The key issues to be considered at this time are:

1. What level of fluency will be the goal for First Nations language programs?
2. Who will provide instruction in Sm'algyax in the future and how will they be trained?
3. When and where will spoken and written Sm'algyax be valued and used?
4. What role will local communities and the home play in language renewal?

An update: Two years later

As of May 1998 we are much further down the road toward language renewal in Tsimshian territory than we were in 1996. Some of the steps that have been taken are:

1. A regional language renewal conference Dm Sa Gatgyedm Algyaga Ts'msyeen (Strengthening the Tsimshian Language) was held in June 1997 under the sponsorship of the Tsimshian Tribal Council. At that conference a strong endorsement for language renewal was received from those present, including chiefs, matriarchs, and elders.
2. The Sm'algyax Year One Program was established in Prince Rupert schools, effectively doubling the number of children learning the language within School District 52. Sm'algyax is now an alternative option to French as a second language for all students in Grades 5, 6, 7 and 8 in the town schools. There are four fluent speakers and four support teachers working in this program. Currently, more than 500 students are enrolled in Sm'algyax, including enrollment in the village schools.
3. Evening programs for adults are now being offered in two venues in Prince Rupert and also in the village communities of Metlakatla, Kitkatla, and Lax Kw'alaams.

4. Development of a detailed curriculum plan and learning resources for Year One is well underway by a committee of fluent speakers and teachers collaborating with the Sm'algyax Language Curriculum Developer.
5. Planning for the next three years of instruction within the Grade 5-8 Program is proceeding.
6. Drama programs utilizing English and Sm'algyax have resulted in the production of three original plays, which were supported by funding from the provincial teachers' association.
7. The Ts'msyeen Sm'algyax Authority has been established and has incorporated with an earlier existing language authority for the language to provide guidance and authority as an arm of the Tsimshian Tribal Council.
8. Tonya Stebbins, a doctoral student based at the University of Melbourne, working with a committee of elders and speakers, has completed a draft of a revised and updated set of dictionaries for Sm'algyax. The resulting document is also stored as a database, which may be updated on an ongoing basis into the future with the guidance of the language authority.
9. The local Role Model Program continues to provide exposure and involvement in the language and the culture to all students in our district.
10. Four storybooks about Txamsm, the Tsimshian trickster/transformer, were published with color illustrations by prominent Tsimshian artists and text in Sm'algyax.
11. A new curriculum guide *Respecting the Salmon* is currently under development with the support of the provincial Ministry of Education. This guide incorporates original stories in English and Sm'algyax and information, both traditional and contemporary, about the six species of salmon that are so important to the local culture.

Note: This paper is based on a discussion paper submitted to the First Nations Education Council, School District 52, on January 10, 1996, and revised May 10, 1998.

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